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REFLECTIONS

ON THE

Natural Foundation

OF THE

HIGH ANTIQUITY

OF

GOVERNMENT,

ARTS, *and* SCIENCES

IN

E G Y P T.

By M^r Foster of C. E. C. Oxon.

— in solo tanta est fiducia NILO.

Lucan.

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REFLECTIONS

ON THE

PROGRESS OF THE

ARTS

AND MANUFACTURES

IN

ENGLAND

FROM THE

REVOLUTION

TO THE PRESENT

PERIOD

BY

A



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Advertisement.

30:7:13.

THE following little Treatise is an Attempt to illustrate a very particular Point in History by viewing it in a Light somewhat different from that, in which it has usually been consider'd. How far this Design is here answer'd must be left to the Reader to determine. In the mean time I am very sensible of the Difficulty of proving Contingencies à priori, and consequently by no means imagine, that every thing here advanc'd is unexceptionable. But should even the Whole appear to be without Foundation, let it be remember'd, that EGYPT is the Subject of it, which, in return as it were for the many Fables, which it formerly impos'd on the World, is itself become by a kind of Prescription the peculiar Province of Fiction and Conjecture.



REFLECTIONS
ON THE
NATURAL FOUNDATION
of the HIGH ANTIQUITY
of GOVERNMENT, ARTS, *and*
SCIENCES *in* EGYPT.

30: 7: 13.

THE High Antiquity of Social Life and Civil Government in Egypt, and the Original Invention of Arts and Sciences by its inhabitants are facts, which, it is well known, are generally attested by the ancient Historians. Some however, and those of great Note, among the Moderns from an apprehension of the consequences of this Supposition, and particularly of its contradicting the Holy Scriptures have been led to suspect the Truth of it, and have accordingly endeavour'd to invalidate the Testimony of the Ancients in this respect. But in answer to these Objections it has been shewn¹, that the

¹ Particularly by the learned and ingenious Mr Warburton in his *Demonstration of the Divine Legation of Moses.*

Tradition above-mention'd is not only consistent in general with the Scripture account of things, but is moreover in a great measure suppos'd and establish'd by it. It may not therefore be amiss to attempt a farther confirmation of its Reality from the Connection it seems to have with the Natural History of Egypt, which, if rightly consider'd, will appear to have had as peculiar a Tendency towards a quick and easy production of the several Comforts and Ornaments of Life, as it is universally observ'd to have with regard to the Necessaries of it.

By the Natural History of Egypt I here understand its particular Face and Situation, and the annual Inundation of it by the Nile, together with the various consequences of this extraordinary circumstance, which has always so remarkably distinguish'd this Country from all others, and by which its first inhabitants were not only put in a *capacity* of inventing the Arts of Social Life sooner than the rest of Mankind, but even *forc'd* as it were to have immediate recourse to them for their very Subsistence and Preservation.

That

That Egypt or some part of it at least was inhabited soon after the Flood seems probable not only from the Names given to it in Scripture², and the high Notion, which both its Natives and Foreigners have always entertain'd of its Antiquity, but likewise from the peculiar Ease, with which Mankind in those early Ages was enabled to subsist in it. And that it was fully peopled sooner perhaps than any other Country may fairly be presum'd from the last mention'd circumstance, (which must continually have invited strangers to settle in it) from the extraordinary Fruitfulness observable in its inhabitants³, from their being shut in to the North and East by the Sea, and the little temptation they could have to remove from this fertile Country either into the Deserts of Lybia or Mountains of Ethiopia.

¹ I say *some part of it* to obviate an objection, that might otherwise be drawn from the commonly receiv'd opinion, that the Delta was at first either entirely cover'd by the Sea, or at least an impracticable Morass.

² The Land of Ham and Mizraim from the Son and Grandson of Noah.

³ The accounts given us of this circumstance, and particularly of the number of children brought forth at a birth are almost incredible, concerning which see Strabo Ed. Amst. p. 1018. Plin. VII. 3. and others.

We have then here a considerable and continually increasing Body of Men settled and confin'd as it were by the circumstances of things within a particular Spot of Ground, at a time that the rest of Mankind must be consider'd as having the World before them, and gradually separating and spreading themselves on the Surface of it according to their Families for mutual Convenience. But every thing in the former case has a manifest and immediate tendency to the Establishment of Civil Society, whilst there is but a very faint and distant Prospect of it in the latter.

Farther, if we take a view of the principal Characteristic of Egypt, viz. the Nile, we shall find its first inhabitants, who might perhaps otherwise have continued for some time like the rest of the World, separate and divided according to their Families, to have been press'd by a kind of Necessity into an immediate Contract with each other. The gradual overflowing of this River must have alarm'd, and united them (nothing being a stronger Cement of Society than a common apprehension of Danger) and have dispos'd them jointly to repair to such Eminences, as with the additional assistance of Art might best secure both themselves

selves and their substance from the mischief threatned by the approaching inundation. The same Accident likewise, which has brought them thus together, keeps them in this situation for a considerable part of the Year', and by its periodical return fixes them in these joint settlements, as being the only places in which they can dwell with security. Thus from the very first continuance of any Number of inhabitants in Egypt an Assembly or rather a City compos'd of several independent Families is necessarily form'd. Nor can this be conceiv'd to have subsisted even for a small space of time without the Establishment both of Civil and Religious Policy in some shape or other.

But the immediate Necessity of regular Government in Egypt, and consequently the early Settlement of it, will still appear in a stronger Light, if we consider another very extraordinary effect, which must every Year have been produc'd by the overflowing of the Nile, till it was afterwards prevented by Arts, which it is said to have given birth to. I mean the confusion of Property arising from

1 Herod. II. 19. Diod. Sic. Ed. Hanov. p. 32. Plin. Nat. Hist. V. 9.
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the annual destruction of the several Bounds or Limits, which separated the Possessions of one Person or Family from those of another. The Original of Civil Government as it stands distinguish'd from that of a Parent or Master of a Family is usually and justly refer'd to a Principle of Self-preservation, which prompted men to unite with each other under certain Laws and Regulations for the mutual Security of their Lives and Properties. But if this Motive was sufficient to hold Mankind together in the other Parts of the World, and to form them into regular Societies, when for the more easy acquisition of the Necessaries of Life, and particularly for the Convenience of Pasture (which seems originally to have furnish'd the greatest share of them) they must naturally have been inclin'd to keep at some Distance from each other, how much more strongly and therefore more immediately must the same Principle have operated on the Egyptians, who from the very Nature of the Country they inhabited, were, as has been observ'd, antecedently forc'd into a kind of Union with each other, and not only liable in common with the rest of Mankind to be robb'd of their Possessions by Violence, but were every Year regularly ejected out of them, ~~far~~ them confounded with

with those of their Neighbours, and therefore lay under a particular Necessity of having recourse to Compacts, Rules, Laws, and in short to all the Essentials of Civil Policy, before they could be securely and peaceably settled in them¹.

In this manner may we trace the great Antiquity of regular Societies in Egypt from Natural Causes, from a strange combination of advantages and inconveniences peculiar to it, which visibly contributed to fill it with inhabitants, occasion'd a close connection and early correspondence between them, and lastly render'd the Establishment of Order and Government in a particular manner necessary to their very Subsistence².

¹ See Strabo Ed. Amst. p. 1136. who thus describes the Confusion of Property occasion'd by the Nile. *Εδνησε δὲ τὸ ἐκ' ἀκριβοῦς καὶ κατὰ λιπτόν διακρίσις ἀλλὰ τὰς συνεχεῖς τῶν ὄρων συγχύσεις, ὡς ὁ Νεῖλος ἀπεργάζεται καὶ τὰς αὐξήσεις, ἀφαιρῶν, καὶ παροχθεῖς, καὶ ἐναλλάττει τὰ χήματα, καὶ πᾶσα σημεῖα ἀποκρύπτει, οἷς ἀκριβέστερ' τὸ, τι αἰδέσθῃ, καὶ τὸ ἴδιον &c.*

² And accordingly the Author above-cited says of them, that they in opposition to the straggling and irregular way of Life, follow'd by their Neighbours *πολιτικῶς & ἡμέρας ΕΞΑΡΧΗΣ ζῶσι, καὶ οὐ γυνήμοις ἰδρυμένη τέποις, ὥστ' & αἱ ἀγαθαὶ αὐτῶν μνημονεύονται. & ἐπανῶνται γὰρ, δοκῶντες αἰσχροῦς χρήσεσθαι τῇ τ' χώρῃ ἐν δαμονίᾳ μερίσσειν τι αὐτῶν, & ἐπιμνησθῆναι.* p. 1135.

With regard to the second thing to be consider'd, viz. the Reality of the Claim, which the Egyptians lay to the Original Cultivation of the most useful Arts and Sciences, this must at first view appear highly probable from the foregoing observations. For Arts and Sciences are plainly the Natural Offspring of Social Life and Civil Government. Where therefore the latter had taken such early Root, it is most reasonable to expect the first Production of the former¹. Besides the same circumstances, that gave occasion for the one, had likewise an equal tendency in favour of the other. For imagine a Number of People abounding in all the Necessaries of Life, prevented for a third part of the Year by the Genius of their Country from employing themselves about them, and annually shut up together during so considerable a space of time for mutual Converse, Information, and Improvement. A suitable Effect must be expected here from so extraordinary a Cause. Nor can we conceive

¹ Especially if we consider the probability there was of their having been by this means enabled to revive several of those arts, which, as the Scriptures seem to intimate, flourish'd in some degree before the Flood, and which the rest of Mankind, not having the same *immediate* occasion for the exercise of them, may easily be conceiv'd to have lost.

it possible, that the Egyptians should not soon grow much more knowing and civiliz'd than the rest of Mankind in proportion to the Opportunity thus afforded them, or rather the Necessity laid upon them of becoming so. To suppose them absolutely unemploy'd during the Period above-mention'd would betray a thorough ignorance of Mankind. And it is remarkable, that from the very Nature of their confinement they were debarr'd from those active, but idle pursuits and diversions, which (if we may argue from common observation) very probably at first engross'd the main attention of the generality of those throughout the rest of the World, who might otherwise have been qualified to polish and instruct it. The very Amusements therefore of an Egyptian must have given him a mild, social, sedentary, thoughtful turn, which according to his different genius, capacity, and circumstances could not fail of regularly exerting itself either in the nobler Sphere of Invention, Speculation, and Science, or in the lower, but not less necessary one of Mechanic Industry and Execution.

What has been here advanc'd may perhaps receive some illustration by descending to particulars.

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ticulars. Thus for instance Architecture properly so call'd¹ is an Art in the cultivation of which the Egyptians seem to have been sooner and more peculiarly interested than the rest of Mankind. For whether we derive its original from meer Necessity and Convenience, or consider the study of it as chiefly owing to an acquir'd Taste for Elegance and Grandeur, in either case the argument will hold in favour of them. Since in the former view of things what is more likely to have given occasion to Solidity and Strength in Building than the annual Inundation of a Country by the overflowing of a River, rising, as is observed both by the Ancients and Moderns, to uncertain Heights², and which therefore must of course excite an Apprehension of Danger from it exceeding the Reality. And this by the way seems in a great measure to account for that otherwise unnatural Bulk and Thickness, which even to this day appears to have been the

¹ By Architecture properly so call'd I here understand the Art of raising solid and durable Buildings in opposition to the slight and moveable Structures, which in the other first inhabited parts of the World on account of the warmth of the Climate, and the difference of circumstances from those of Egypt must for some time at least have answer'd all the purposes of Life.

² See Plin. Nat. Hist. V. 10. Lucas Vol. 2. p. 327. Sandys p. 75.

principal



principal characteristic of the Egyptian Taste not only in Architecture, but Statuary¹, and indeed throughout most of their Mechanical Productions. Nor secondly, is there less reason to expect an early cultivation of this Art with a view to Splendour and Elegance both in public and private Edifices from a People, whom Necessity had thus fix'd at once in regular Establishments, and their particular circumstances continually inspir'd with a peculiar relish for the Civil Comforts and Ornaments of Life².

Hence also may we as naturally deduce the Elements of Navigation. The very Notion of embarking on the open Sea has at first view something terrible in it to the ignorant and unexperienc'd³. Nor can Mankind rea-

¹ See the accounts given by Travellers of the Sphinxes, and the description of the Colossal Statues in upper Egypt lately presented to the Royal Society by Capt. Norden with a Draught of the suppos'd Ruins of ancient Thebes lying at a little distance from them, where the first Elements of the Greek Column may easily be trac'd out.

² We have a good presumption of the Reality of these and some of the following observations in the History and Descriptions of the early Rise and Grandeur of Venice.

³ Illi robur & æs triplex

Circa pectus erat, qui fragilem truci

Commisit pelago ratem

Primus, &c. *Horat.*

sonably be conceiv'd to have ventur'd on so dangerous an undertaking, before it had been gradually hardned by previous exercise and observation. But what Country is more likely to have furnish'd these preparatory circumstances than Egypt, where both a large River and an annual Inundation render'd the practice of this Art necessary to the keeping up a free commerce and communication among the inhabitants, and even the most unskilful Sailor in his little excursions on so smooth a Surface had no Danger to apprehend, nor Difficulty to encounter.

Military Knowledge in like manner, or the Art of War may with equal reason be conceiv'd to have originally flourish'd here. For till the Union of the whole Country into one Kingdom, which both from fact¹ and reason appears to have been the work of time, the different independent States in it could not fail from the very Nature of things of having almost continual Disputes and Wars with each other. Since besides the common accidents, whence animosities are every where found to subsist between neighbouring Communities, the

¹ See Marsham's Chron. *Ægyptiac.* p. 24, 25. &c.

annual Regulation of their several Territories, which like the possessions of private Families, were confounded by the overflowing of the Nile, seems to afford an infinite Subject for Contention. As the stronger therefore had by this means a peculiar Temptation and Opportunity to invade the weaker, they on the other hand were oblig'd to be constantly provided for their defence, till at length these different States being either by Conquest or voluntary Association gradually united to each other, a large and powerful Kingdom is form'd on the same principles, which had before given rise to all the several parts of which it is compos'd.

But it would be needless as well as infinite to point out distinctly the Connection, which the early invention of the principal Conveniences of Life, and particularly the cultivation of the several Mechanic Arts has with the peculiar circumstances of the Egyptians. Since whoever has at all reflected on the original of these things in general must be sensible, that as soon as any People is civiliz'd, and several of them by a Subordination of different Ranks in a State, and a variety of other accidents are freed from their primitive Anxiety
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in procuring the Necessaries of Life, a Succession of other Wants both real and imaginary gradually flows in upon them, the removal of which becoming both the interest and business of their inferiours will presently quicken their invention, and excite their industry to to furnish them with these wish'd for Conveniences and Ornaments. The proof therefore of the Antiquity of these Arts in Egypt is such as obviously results from the Topics already insisted on.

The case indeed with regard to the higher Branches of Knowledge, or the Speculative Sciences is somewhat different, as it cannot be pretended, that the Nature of any Country could be so necessarily and immediately productive of them. And yet the Egyptians have in Fact an almost undisputed claim to the invention of Geometry, Arithmetic, and Astronomy¹. Nor will this appear to be ill supported even by Reason, if we attend to these two considerations. First, that not only the particular Sciences above-mention'd, but al-

¹ The Phœnicians indeed make pretensions to the two latter, but, as they were partly an Egyptian Colony, they probably brought with them the first Elements of these Sciences from their Mother Country.

most the whole circle of them seems to have sprung up originally from some occasional hints and discoveries accidentally resulting from practical and mechanical enquiries. The early and particular concern therefore, which the Egyptians had in the cultivation of the Arts of measuring and calculating, and in observing as exactly as possible the periodical return of the Seasons in order to prognosticate the rise or fall of the Nile, necessarily gave them a proportionable advantage with respect to the invention of the corresponding Sciences. Secondly, That as their Confinement so often insisted on could not but inspire some of them with a peculiar turn for Reflection and Speculation in general, so it is most natural to suppose, that this would chiefly be directed to the consideration of such Truths, as had been suggested to them at first by Arts so instrumental to their Preservation and Happiness, and which, they must easily perceive, had also a regular tendency towards the improvement of them.

These Observations on the Foundation, which the High Antiquity of Civil Policy, and the Original of Arts and Sciences in Egypt has in the Nature of things might, I
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am sensible, be deservedly look'd upon as idle and visionary Speculations, if the facts, they are brought to illustrate, were not previously supported by positive Testimony. But it must be remember'd, that we have the Authority of the best ancient Historians to prove, that what is here asserted to be *probable*, was generally believ'd to have *really* happen'd. The above Remarks therefore, if just, must be admitted as good, presumptive, additional Evidence, and are so far at least useful, as they are capable of balancing or outweighing the Objections, which are sometimes rais'd against these Relations from their suppos'd improbability. Besides, other more material consequences are perhaps deducible from them.

For first, if it be true that the Egyptians from the very Nature of their Country were necessarily settled in regular Societies, and civiliz'd long before the rest of Mankind, it will contribute greatly towards reconciling in general the ancient traditional Accounts of them with the Scripture History of the Time and Manner of peopling the Universe. Since upon this Supposition it is both natural to expect, that their Pretensions to Antiquity
should

should run much higher than those of other Nations, and we may likewise reasonably allow them the larger Space of time to contain what is authentic in their Annals, and which in fact will be fully sufficient for that purpose, when they are freed from those absurdities, that are visibly the work of later Ages, obviously resulting from a Principle of Vanity common to the Writers of all Nations, and which could not fail of carrying things to an unusual Height in Egypt in proportion to the goodness of the Foundation it had to build upon.

Secondly, These Reflections will assist us in accounting for a very remarkable and fundamental Circumstance in the Genius of the ancient Egyptians. I mean the extraordinary Veneration they appear to have entertain'd for Religion, Government, and in short for all the Institutions of their Ancestours, and Regulations of Public Wisdom, the Reason of which will easily appear from hence, That in other Countries the Expediency and Advantages of such Establishments (especially when obscur'd by occasional abuses and inconveniences) require some share of Penetration and exercise of Thought for their Discernment;

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whereas

whereas every common Egyptian according to the Principles here laid down could not but feel even in the worst of circumstances the Necessity of them to his very Subsistence and Preservation. Hither also may be refer'd their no less remarkable Aversion to the Customs of other Nations, which is both a consequence of the former, and alike founded in the eminent Distinction, which Nature had made between them and the rest of the World.

Thirdly, these Observations seem to lay open a wise and regular Scheme of Providence for the general Improvement and Benefit of Mankind. It is a fact well supported by Historical Tradition, that most of the first civiliz'd Nations of old were in some degree either immediately or mediately Egyptian Colonies¹, and that others, which were of a different Extraction, were forc'd to have an early and constant recourse to this fruitful Country to

¹ Such for instance were those said to have been led by Belus into Assyria, Cecrops into Attica, Danaus into the Peloponnesus, Agenor into Phœnicia, and from thence in after ages to several of the Islands and Coasts of the Mediterranean, and probably to some parts of the Atlantic Ocean. See Diod. Sic. Marlham, Shuckford, and others.

supply themselves with the Necessaries of Life¹. May we not therefore justly consider Egypt as purposely distinguish'd by its Natural Constitution and Circumstances, and thereby peculiarly fitted to become the Fountain of useful Knowledge, and the School of the Universe? Nay as ridiculously superstitious as this Nation may vulgarly be thought to have always been, and undoubtedly was at last, one may however venture to assert, that the rest of the Heathen World originally receiv'd real Benefit from it even in the article of Religion. Since the Egyptians must, from what has been observ'd of them, have been peculiarly enabled to preserve some valuable Remains of the ancient Patriarchal form of Worship in their religious Establishments. And this by the way will perhaps best account for the Original of some of their principal Rites and Ceremonies without having recourse to so unlikely an expedient as an Imitation of the Jews. But however this be, these Remains, blackned as they were in succeeding Ages with Fiction and Errour, were surely preferable either to the mad Schemes of speculative Atheism, or the stupid insensibility of the Bar-

¹ Genes. c.37. 25. and c.41. 57.

barian. For in fact we find, that by this means the Knowledge of several important Truths (such as the Immortality of the Soul, the Superintendency of Providence, and the Necessity of some External Worship of the Deity) was kept up. Nor can this be conceiv'd to have been wholly unworthy of the Divine Concern and Support, till Mankind by its gradual improvement was become capable of entertaining a purer and more perfect System of Religion.

Lastly it is probable, that the above-mention'd design of Providence might also have a particular respect to the Jewish People. Not indeed that we are to imagine the Israelites sent into Egypt to bring (as the Unbeliever would insinuate they did, as well as other Nations) their Religion from thence, (for this was certainly the singular and uniform Work of a Greater Hand) but to train them up and discipline them in another View, to improve them in some of the principal Arts of Life, to make them sensible of the Advantages of Order and Government, and to inure them by a previous Subjection to Bondage to bear with greater ease the peculiar, but necessary Restraints

straints of their future Establishment. Nor is this View of things at all unnatural. A large and continually encreasing Family, which even in the first generation Paternal Authority was too weak to withhold from committing some of the most shocking Enormities ¹, and which therefore could not have been long kept together in proper order on that footing, whilst on the other hand they were equally unripe for the regular Plan of Government design'd for them, stood of course in need of some intermediate and temporary Provision, which might gradually qualify them for their intended Settlement. But Egypt seems to have been the only Nation in these early Ages, that was capable of maintaining, subjecting, and employing this vast Multitude, of being thus a Nursery to six hundred thousand Men ². The particular Formation therefore of this fruitful Country, which forc'd it as we have seen into early Greatness, was peculiarly calculated to answer this as well as other important Ends. And the Israelites without any

¹ Viz. The Massacre of Hamor and his Subjects by Simeon and Levi, the Incest committed by Reuben, the intended Murder of Joseph, and the Sale of him to the Ishmaelites.

² Exod. 12. 37.

Reflection on the Divine Original of their Constitution may be conceiv'd to have reap'd much the same Advantages from their Egyptian Bondage, as have since in a greater degree accrued to so many other Nations from a like subjection to Greece and Rome.

The E N D.

30:7:13.





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